



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
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pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للترية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Office of the Director-General  
Spokesperson**

**Statement by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,  
Director-General of UNESCO,  
in response to announcement by the  
First Lady of the United States of America,  
Mrs Laura Bush**

I warmly welcome the announcement by Mrs Laura Bush that she will host a second international literacy meeting in New York on 22 September 2008 in her capacity as Honorary Ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade. The symposium will draw together the conclusions of the six regional literacy conferences organized by UNESCO during 2007 and 2008, with a view to assessing the main outcomes and identifying the next steps. The first White House Conference in Support of Global Literacy, which Mrs Bush convened in New York in September 2006, and which inspired the series of UNESCO regional conferences, was a resounding success and gave a major boost to international efforts to provide literacy to all. I am confident that this second meeting will provide fresh impetus to this important campaign.

As Honorary Ambassador for the UN Literacy Decade, Mrs Bush has been an advocate of the power of literacy to transform lives, strengthen democracy and drive forward social and economic progress. This second meeting is yet another example of her determination to place literacy at the heart of the international development agenda.

Through our coordination of the UN Literacy Decade, and through our country-level Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), UNESCO is working closely with Member States to raise awareness of the global literacy challenge and galvanize action to address it. The UNESCO regional Conferences – which have been held in Qatar, China, Mali, India and Azerbaijan, with the final meeting in the series scheduled to take place in Mexico in early September – have helped to advance this work, identifying good practices, mobilizing new partnerships, and supporting country-led operations. The symposium in September, while drawing to an end this rewarding series, will also mark the beginning of a new phase in our efforts.

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Here, the real hard work must begin among all stakeholders to deliver on the recommendations made. Now is the time for action; and time is short.

This year represents both the mid-term of the UN Literacy Decade and the halfway point towards the 2015 target date for achieving Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Unless efforts are redoubled to reach the over 774 million adults in the world who still cannot read or write, then these development objectives will not be met. The need to tackle female illiteracy is of particular urgency. Women account for two-thirds of all adult illiterates. Yet, we know that female literacy – with its proven benefits for health, nutrition, education and household income – is important for reaching every one of the MDGs. Drawing on the outcomes of the regional conferences, UNESCO is developing a strategic framework for action for the second half of the UN Literacy Decade aimed at scaling up and accelerating efforts to address this urgent situation.

Let me once again thank Mrs Bush for her inspiring leadership as Honorary Ambassador for the Decade. Her hard work and dedication have encouraged other First Ladies across the globe to speak out in support of literacy, and have propelled national governments and other key partners to step up their commitments in this area. I am very much looking forward to working with her, and her team, in organizing what promises to be another landmark event in our drive to achieve global literacy.

Koïchiro Matsuura